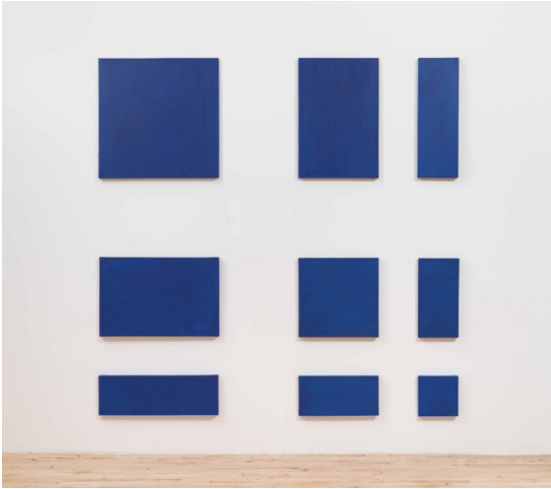


JULY 11, 2016

PAUL MOGENSEN PAINTING

by Greg Lindquist



Paul Mogensen, no title, 1968-71. 9-part cobalt blue oil on canvas. 90 x 90 inches. Courtesy Del Deo & Barzune.

In a review of Paul Mogensen's second solo exhibition in the late 1960s (at the Bykert Gallery, whose roster also included Carl Andre, Brice Marden, and David Novros), Hilton Kramer gave a succinct, two-sentence description of the paintings' color, arrangement, and progression, concluding with "that's all." Kramer's final sentence rings with a certain terse uneasiness (and dismissal) yet also reads as a matter-of-fact, even casual observation that emulates the deceptive appearance of simplicity in the work itself.

The recent exhibition of Mogensen's work at Del Deo & Barzune reunites paintings from the late 1960s and '70s, along with one outlier from 2015. While at first glance the paintings appear to conform to a broadly Minimalist aesthetic, closer examination reveals a nuanced breed of modular abstraction based not on Donald Judd's reign of seriality and symmetry, but rather on mathematical progressions and classical ratios.

Boxcar (1967), the earliest painting in the exhibition and arguably its central work, builds on the mirror-image repetition of eight interlocking acrylic-on-canvas units that double as they proceed. Coated in an iron oxide rusted hue that recalls its title, the Boxcar's mathematical regularity contrasts lushly with its non-uniform effects: bulging canvas, stretched edges, and sensual and varied treatments of surface that are far removed from the machined manufacturing of Judd's later work. In some passages, painted with a light touch, the underlying weave is visible. In others, where the paint is more heavily applied, it disappears. In no title (1973), six interleaving canvases appropriate the unfurling Fibonacci spiral mathematical diagram in a tiling, each white square canvas roughly doubling in size. (The logarithmic spiral motif has preoccupied Mogensen since the mid '60s—well before Robert Smithson created Spiral Jetty—and this focus is evident in the newer works in the gallery's back room.)

Mogensen has also translated this serial system of progressions into the negative space outside of canvases in works aligned on a tense grid. In no title (1973), nine white acrylic lacquer masonite

panels whose vertical orientations double in width from right to left are installed with spacings that reiterate their shifts of dimension and format from right to left as well as from bottom to top. This framework is seen at a more immersive scale with nine cobalt canvases in no title, (1968 – 71). Spacing the distance of the first canvas from the floor to correspond to the height of the first canvas and running towards the ceiling, Mogensen builds an intense interlocking unit of paintings that comprise one stalwart, cohering work.

The most affecting and original works are those that meld with the architectural interior, their scale enveloping the viewer's body while their mathematical permutations stimulate the mind. A uniquely related contemporary artist is Linda Francis, whose interest in mathematics originated in trigonometry and developed through studying the relationships of physics and astronomy, and who, like Mogensen, reaches for a similar alignment of visual structure that joins mathematical structures with vigorous representation of paintings as physical material and sensuous form.